

COUNTY COUNCIL OF DORCHESTER COUNTY
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TESTIMONY

TO: HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
FROM: DORCHESTER COUNTY COUNCIL
BILL: HOUSE BILL 594 ENTITLED "LEGAL ADVERTISEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE-PUBLICATION IN NEWSPAPER OR NEWSPAPER IN GENERAL CIRCULATION-DIGITAL NEWSPAPERS"
HEARING: FEBRUARY 13, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair and Committee Members:

The Dorchester Banner and The Star Democrat are the only two news publications in Dorchester County that qualify under §1-113 of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland as a "newspaper of general circulation." The Dorchester Banner only publishes and distributes a physical newspaper on Wednesdays. The Monday and Tuesday editions of The Star Democrat are online only. This news publication publishes and distributes a physical newspaper on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (which is labeled "Friday/Saturday"), and Sunday.

Due to publication requirements outlined in the County Charter/County Code, some advertisements have to be published multiple times which increases costs. Whereas other advertisements need to be published prior to the day of County Council meetings which occur on Tuesday. Unfortunately neither newspaper of general circulation in the County publishes a printed newspaper on Monday. Additionally, if the Dorchester Banner were to change its print edition publication date from Wednesday to any other day of the week, we may be unable to utilize this publication in print format due to publication requirements or in an online format since that option is not currently available pursuant to State law.

We are also concerned that if these publications move to an online format the Dorchester County Council will be unable to conduct business until legislative relief can be obtained, at the detriment of Dorchester County citizens. This is particularly troubling since during the COVID-19 pandemic the Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session was cut short. If such an event were to occur close to the same time as these news publications shift to online only, there may be a substantial delay.

In light of the above, the County Council respectfully asks that you give consideration to seeking changes to ensure that local jurisdictions are able to use other alternative sources if the shift is made by our newspapers of general circulation to online only publications.